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MEAT CURING

In curing pork or any other meats, proper temperature is the most important feature. Always chill the meat from freshly dressed hogs as promptly and thoroughly as you would fresh milk, says K. F. Warner of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Hold the chilled meat during curing at a temperature around 38° F. if possible.

The standard curing mixture for each 100 pounds of meat is 8 pounds of salt, 2 pounds of sugar, 2 ounces of saltpeter, and 4½ to 6 gallons of water. Weigh the meat, calculate the materials needed, and put the required amount of water into a crock or clean, well-soaked, odorless hardwood barrel. Pour the curing ingredients into the water and stir until dissolved. Pack hams and shoulders skin side down in the crock or barrel, and fit them closely together. Cover the pack with the cold pickling solution. Use a clean weight to hold the meat below the surface of the brine. On the 5th, 15th and 30th days after being put down, the hams and shoulders should be overhauled. That is, they may be placed in another barrel and re-covered with the same brine, or repacked in the same barrel so as to mix the pickling solution and insure its coming in contact with all parts of each cut. Bacon strips are usually packed flat, skin side down, and left on the top where they can be easily removed when ready for smoke. Hold hams and shoulders in brine 4 days to a pound. Bacon can be cured in 1½ to 2 days per pound. Small pieces must be taken out of the solution sooner than the heavy ones, of course.

For dry curing, use the same 8-2-2 mixture without the water. The time in cure is 2 days per pound for hams and shoulders with a minimum of 25 days. Bacon and loins take 2 to 3 weeks, depending on the size. Spareribs need 1 week. Regulate the time for each cut according to the size of the piece.

Smoked cured meat will have a brighter color and a milder flavor if it is freshened in cold water before being smoked. Hams and shoulders are soaked about 2 hours and bacon about 30 minutes. All pieces to be smoked should be strung and scrubbed with warm water to remove excess salt and grease. Hang the cured, washed meat in the smokehouse overnight to drain and dry. Start the fire in the morning. Hang the meat so that no two pieces touch.

Cured pork may be smoked at a temperature of 100° to 120° F. with ventilators open. Two days should give it a rich mahogany brown color. Green hickory wood and sawdust are the standard fuels for smoking, but almost any hardwood such as oak, apple, maple, or ash will be satisfactory. Even corncobs may be used where timber is scarce. Meat to be stored through the summer is usually smoked for several days at a temperature of 70-90° F.

Wrap and store all smoked meats so as to protect them from insects and from mice and other rodents.

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